

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

CONCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMSIXTFHLT

COMIDESTFOR

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

UNCLAS CAIRO 16719

AMCONSUL PORT SAID SENDS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EWWT, EG

SUBJECT: POTENTIAL DANGERS IN PORT SAID HARBOR

1. SUMMARY: CONDITIONS IN THE SMALL AND RESTRICTED HARBOR OF PORT SAID ARE SUCH AS TO POSE A THREAT TO THE SAFETY OF VESSELS EITHER MOORED IN ITS CONFINES OR TRANSITING THE AREA TO OR FROM SUEZ CANAL. THE NARROW HARBOR CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH VESSELS TRANSITING THE CANAL MUST PAST CAN BRING THEM TO WITHIN 75 YARDS OF MOORED SHIPS AWAITING NEXT CONVOY, AND THE SEEMINGLY COMMON PRACTICE OF SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITY (SCA) PILOTS TO EXCEED THE HARBOR'S SEVEN MILE AN HOUR SPEED LIMIT HAS FREQUENTLY RESULTED IN VESSELS PARTING LINES AND DRIFTING DANGEROUSLY. ALTHOUGH NO MAJOR ACCIDENTS HAVE YET OCCURED, THE POTENTIAL FOR A MAJOR COLLISION IS HIGH, AND IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DEPARTMENT TAKE WHATEVER STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO ADVISE SHIP OWNERS AND MASTERS OF THIS PROBLEM.

END SUMMARY.

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2. VESSELS ARRIVING TO PORT SAID FOR TRANSIT OF THE SUEZ CANAL ARE, TO EXTENT POSSIBLE, BROUGHT INTO THE HARBOR AND MOORED AT SEVERAL ANCHORAGES WHICH GENERALLY PARALLEL THE HARBOR'S MAIN CHANNEL. USUALLY BY 1900 HOUR LOCAL, WHEN THE LAST VESSEL IS NORMALLY ALLOWED TO ENTER, THE HARBOR IS BADLY CONGESTED WITH SHIPPING. VESSELS ARE ANCHORED ALONG BOTH SIDES OF THE MAIN CHANNEL, THROUGH WHICH THE CONVOY PASSES, AND ON OCCASION PRACTICALLY IN THE CHANNEL ITSELF. THIS PRACTICE REQUIRES THE CONVOY TO PASS WITHIN AS LITTLE AS 75 YARDS OF VESSELS ANCHORED IN HARBOR.

3. PERSONAL OBSERVATION AND REPORTS FROM MASTERS SUGGESTS THAT SCA PILOTS HAVE DEVELOPED HABIT OF EXCEEDING HARBOR'S SEVEN MILE AN HOUR SPEED LIMIT, OFTEN BY DOUBLE. THIS HAS ENDANGERED VESSELS MOORED THROUGHOUT THE HARBOR AND PARTED LINES AND DRIFTING VESSELS ARE A COMMON PROBLEM. RECENTLY, MASTER OF US FLAG BULK CARRIER S/S OGDEN CHAMPION REPORTED PARTING EIGHT 10-INCH HAWSERS DURING THREE HOUR PERIOD WHILE CONVOY PASSED AT EXCESSIVE SPEED IN CLOSE PROXIMITY OF HIS VESSEL. MASTER OF US FLAG TUG SAID THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS ACCIDENT IN THE HARBOR WAS HIGH, AND HE SHARES REPORTING OFFICER'S BELIEF THAT IT IS ONLY MATTER OF TIME BEFORE A MAJOR COLLISION OCCURS IN HARBOR.

4. SCA OFFICIALS DENY ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR PILOTS AND MAINTAIN THAT BY LAW AND TRADITION MASTER HAS THE ULTIMATE AND TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY OF HIS VESSEL. WHILE THAT IS ACCEPTABLE, THEY CONTINUE THAT PILOTS ARE YOUNG AND CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO OBSERVE SPEED LIMITS, AN AMAZING ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY ON PART OF SCA.

5. IN VIEW OF ABOVE, I RECOMMEND THAT THE DEPARTMENT TAKE APPROPRIATE STEPS TO SEE THAT THIS INFORMATION IS MADE AVAILABLE TO MASTERS OF VESSELS LIKELY TO CALL ON SUEZ CANAL PORTS. IN PARTICULAR, EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PLACED ON FOLLOWING:

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A. SCA PILOTS MAY ORDER VESSELS TO TRAVEL AT SPEEDS IN VIOLATION OF LOCAL LIMITS AND RULES OF GOOD SEAMANSHIP. THE SCA HAS DISAVOWED ANY RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS MATTER AND ANY RESULTING DAMAGE WILL BE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MASTER AND OWNER.

B. VESSELS MOORED IN PORT SAID HARBOR MAY EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES DUE TO THE CLOSE PASSAGE OF VESSELS TRAVELING AT EXCESSIVE SPEEDS. TUGS MAY OR MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE TO ASSIST DRIFTING VESSELS, AS THEY WERE NOT IN THE CASE OF S/S OGDEN CHAMPION.

C. MASTERS WHO FEEL THAT THEIR VESSELS HAVE BEEN ENDANGERED EITHER BY POOR SEAMANSHIP OR RECKLESSNESS ON PART OF THE PILOT, OR BY PASSAGE OF VESSELS AT EXCESSIVE SPEEDS, SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO REPORT THE INCIDENT IN WRITING TO SCA IMMEDIATELY, GIVING FULL PARTICULARS.

6. MASTERS SHOULD ALSO BE REMINDED THAT THIS CONSULATE IS NOW OPEN AND AT THEIR SERVICE. AFTER SOME NINE MONTHS SINCE RE-OPENING POST, NONE OF MAJOR US FLAG SHIPPING COMPANIES SEEM TO REGULARLY ADVISE THEIR MASTERS OF AMCONSULATEPORT SAID'S EXISTANCE. SIGNED SURBER.
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